

Volunteering - a tradition still running strong at the Corps

Volunteering has a long and varied history. From Phidippides, who ran from Athens to Sparta and back seeking support in a war (but didn't die, as popularly believed) to everyday men and women willing to be roused from sleep to answer the call of the volunteer fire department's bell or gently wash the feathers of a bedraggled bird after an oil spill,



volunteering still carries the desire to go beyond simple day-to-day existence in order to improve life for someone else.

Whether it's to help a neighbor down the block or someone they'll never meet, volunteers have made a difference in millions of lives. It's a legacy the Los Angeles District is proud to be a part of.

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U.S. Army Corps
of Engineers
Los Angeles District

**L.A. District team -
'Deeds, not Words' -
moves to a new level**

**Volunteering
around
the world**

TEAM MEMBERS SWAP

TO
UP
STEP

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Design Branch's Vidaurre clothes, feeds L.A. Skid Row homeless

ROXANNE VIDAURRE: Each month, the Engineering Division Design Branch civil engineer uses her own time and money to feed and provide other necessities to the homeless in Downtown L.A.'s Skid Row. She's been doing it for a year and plans on continuing "my efforts to provide at least a little more comfort to the homeless."

She sets aside money each month for whatever the downtrodden need—socks, blankets or T-shirts—"and I literally bring them in my car and distribute them as they walk along the sidewalk." She also makes sandwiches at home to deliver downtown and, over Thanksgiving, she and her family cooked a turkey to serve to the urban homeless.

Recently, with her church in Santa Fe Springs, she has been traveling to Ensenada, Mexico, every two months to an orphanage there. "We take things they need," she said, "something to cook for breakfast. People brought eggs for 100 kids, I brought pancake flour, somebody else rice and beans. We also bring clothes and other essential items." The volunteers stay in dorms there the night before fixing breakfast for the orphans. Even with the four-hour one-way trip, Vidaurre said, "I find great fulfillment in helping those in need."



You could call March Project Engineer Berg 'Mr. Mayor' throughout Beaumont



ROGER BERG: Since 1979 Roger Berg, now office engineer at the March Project Office in Riverside County east of Los Angeles, has compiled an impressive agenda of volunteer activities. Beginning as a volunteer fireman with the Beaumont Fire Dept., he steadily diversified his urban portfolio to include two terms as mayor of the city, four terms as mayor pro tem and three terms on the city council over the last dozen years. "I really enjoy doing this as I am helping out my community," he said. "Our community is rapidly growing and we have been able to do some good long-term planning in the areas of flood control, water recycling, environmental planning and traffic control." He said his experience with the Corps (since January 1993) "has allowed me to have a better understanding of our city's problems and how to meet those needs."

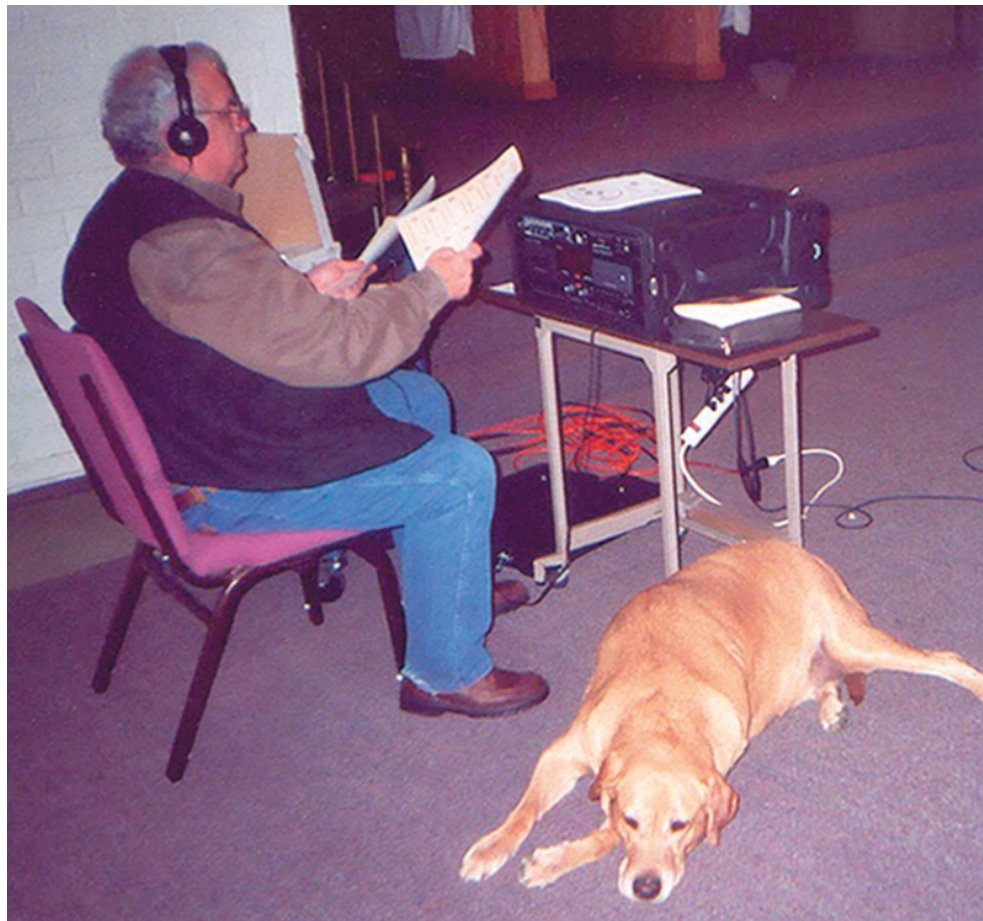
As a Beaumont City Council member, he has also served on several boards in Riverside County: the Western Riverside Council of Governments from 2000 to 2003 and the Riverside County Transportation Commission from 2004 till the present.

While serving five years as a volunteer fireman, he took college courses in Fire Science at a local junior college, obtaining a certificate in that field and certification as an EMT. From 1981-84 he served on Beaumont's Planning Commission.

"I also spend quite a bit of time working with my church on youth activities," he added. "In March I will be taking a trip to Kenya in Africa to help with a building project at a Bible college there."

Biologist trains dog as therapist, studies with O.C. Carmelites

THOMAS KEENEY: It's little wonder that Keeney, a senior biologist in the Planning Branch's Environmental Resource Branch, has for three decades been involved in voluntary missions involving plants and wildlife—as well as plain old pet dogs.



With his faithful Labrador retriever Sage, he joined the Delta Society, which helps train dogs for animal-assisted therapy. Contrary to Keeney's expectations, Sage passed his tests and soon they were visiting hospitals and assisted-care facilities so the patients could benefit from Sage's, well, sage company. In addition, Keeney has been involved with the National Audubon Society in bird counts in six SoCal counties since 1976, and he's been president, board member and program chair of the California Native Plant Society and its Channel Island chapter.

"Every year as a boy I went backpacking with my dad on the eastern slopes of the Sierra," Keeney recalled. "We went to the desert; we just did a lot of hiking and backpacking together. I got my love of nature from my dad."

In the '80s, while his own daughters were playing soccer, he was heavily involved as a volunteer manager, coach and commissioner with American Youth Soccer Organization teams in Whittier. Around the same time, he was vice president of St. Bruno's School Board and vice president of Cal Poly Pomona's School of Science Alumni Assn.

At the turn of the millennium, perhaps symbolically, he became intensely engaged as a volunteer with the Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles. He had been driving 150 miles a day for 13 years between Point Mugu, where he was natural resource manager at the U.S. Naval Air Station there, and his home. He decided to take some time off, which turned out to be 18 months. During that period, "I found immense solace just being in the midst of the Carmelite Sisters," he recalled. "I learned to listen to God on a weekend men's retreat, which is a 36-hour silent retreat for reflection and meditation at the Sacred Heart Retreat House and through St. Joseph Center (Alhambra) and St. Joseph Radio (Orange), learning to pray and communicate with the Triune God."

Ever since, he has volunteered at those places as an associate editor in a lecture series, in audio production and in fundraising, as well as doing landscape projects. At Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in La Habra, he's a Eucharistic minister, coordinator of the Catholic Men's Fellowship Men's Ministry and is involved in the 24-hour Vigil Ministry.

Currently, Keeney is in the third year of the five-year novitiate process with the Carmelites and is also studying and training to become a deacon for the Diocese of Orange County through his parish church in La Habra.

WORDS FOR DEEDS.

VOLUNTEER

The word "volunteer" comes, predictably enough, from Latin. It's derived from *voluntas*, which means "will," and *voluntarias*, which means "one's own free will."

But go even further back than Roman times for a more expansive definition. Go back to Proto-Indo-European (PIE), a reconstructed ancestral language of the Indo-European family roaming the continent roughly 5,500 years ago, according to Etymonline.com, a Web site that studies the roots of words.

The Latin came from PIE's *wel* or *wol*, which means "will be pleasing."

The District's many volunteers don't perform their impressive off-duty acts to please themselves—they do them to please others. To help others. "We wanted to do something to help our community," explains Betty Melendez, lead budget analyst in the Programs Management Branch about her family's work for the Humane Society in San Bernardino, "and our daughter Christina needed to learn about community service."

To highlight some of these extraordinary actions from otherwise ordinary District

team members, we're presenting this special issue of Newcastle. It describes the contributions of time, effort, money and energy that folks from all over the District give to causes outside the Corps. The special issue doesn't include the scores of team members who have volunteered—and continue to volunteer—for Corps-related duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, the post-Katrina Gulf Coast and other critical missions. We have written about them in previous Newscastles and on the Web site.

This time, we focus on what and why so many give of themselves to worthy projects outside their regular Corps work.

Just as they don't like to talk about their own job performances for the District and the nation, except in the context of our team, our workers are bashful about discussing their volunteer activities. Still, we managed to get several of them to volunteer to tell their stories.

We in Public Affairs certainly find them "pleasing." We hope you do too.

- By Mike Tharp
Photos courtesy of story subjects.

Real Estate’s Manzo carries eucharist to elderly Filipinos

ELBA MANZO: The budget assistant in Real Estate Division is also a Eucharistic minister, at St. Brendan’s Catholic Church in Los Angeles. There, she helps distribute the Eucharist during Sunday Mass and other Masses during the week when it’s her day off.

In addition, she volunteers to take the Eucharist to Catholic patients and residents at a local assisted-living facility in west Los Angeles. Her father is there, but Manzo goes not just for him. “They’re all elderly folks and want to have a part of the Eucharist,” she explained. “I get it from the church and give it to them to strengthen their faith. I like to share my services, especially around the Filipino community. Since I go to that parish, which serves our Filipino community, I might as well serve too.”



Ernesto Elias: Since the early ’90s, the construction-representative at the District Yuma Project Office has been committed to changing lives, especially by mentoring youth in math and science. “If I could change the life of only one student and get them motivated to study hard and stay in school, I have fulfilled my goal,” he explained.

Elias currently oversees the Army’s ongoing family housing project at the Yuma Proving Ground (YPG). He recently participated in an outreach event for math students from Carver Elementary School at YPG to emphasize the importance of studying math and staying in school. Elias also initiated a tour of the Armament Operations Center on the base so children could see engineers at work. He explained how higher education means better-paying jobs.

Math, science and a touch of ground water add up to strong futures

Elias began volunteering over a decade ago. He was hired to teach guitar during an after-school program at Palmcroft Elementary in Yuma, Arizona. “Getting paid for this work made me feel uncomfortable, so I volunteered instead,” Elias explained. He served as a youth leader and a music and choir teacher at the Yuma Apostolic Church. During this time he learned about a school in Somerton, Ariz., a few miles south of Yuma that had the worst academic scores in the state. He contacted the vice-principal and volunteered to sponsor field trips to the Yuma Desalting Plant where he worked for the Bureau of Reclamation. He believed that the students could be motivated by their exposure to the various trades within the facility. Records showed the mentoring program resulted in higher academic scores.

He created a display to teach children about groundwater modeling and reverse osmosis for water purification that still resides in the Bureau’s visitor’s facility where children learn about groundwater releases and well operations affected by the nearby Gila and Colorado rivers. He continues volunteering at science and career fairs using surveying demonstrations and groundwater modeling techniques.

“I fully support the president on this one. ...If our children can focus on math and science, they can do anything,” Elias said.

Planning division’s Vasquez becomes one-woman industry

PATRICIA VASQUEZ: As a single mom, this Planning Division secretary first started volunteering to spend more time with her daughter, Veronica Newburn, now 12. She has morphed into a one-woman industry in Girl Scouts, the parent-teachers organization at her daughter’s school, at their church and at a local park.



She began coaching Veronica’s Little League team when she was 12, then became a Girl Scout leader for three years. She has also helped coach her in soccer and basketball.

At Veronica’s private school, Dolores Mission Elementary, Vasquez has been president, secretary, treasurer, executive board member, class rep and subcommittee member of the Parent Advisor Committee (like a PTA). She’s been backup basketball coach for the girls’ A team and volunteers at Bible study once a month.

This year she’s also secretary of the Pecan Park Advisory Board, helping with Kids in Sports, a nonprofit organization. She helps out with the basketball, softball and soccer games and tournaments, organizes sports schedules, sells food during games to raise money for team awards and wraps and distributes presents during Christmas to underprivileged children in the neighborhood. “Sometimes I don’t have monetary means,” she said. “If I can’t give money, I can give of my time. Everybody has something special they can give, and for me, I can give of my time. The bottom line is that I can help other people. It doesn’t only benefit my daughter—it benefits everybody.”

No surprise that Vasquez volunteered in January to spend a month on the Gulf Coast with post-Katrina recovery and reconstruction efforts.

Ruiz joins apostolic movement’s aid to three Mexican cities



DEANNA RUIZ: The e-mail emblem of this Programs Management Branch team member declares: “A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way.” She has clearly taken heed of John C. Maxwell’s dictum and is “a proud member of the ‘Regnum Christi’, Legionnaires of Christ, a Catholic Apostolic Movement in the service of mankind and the Church.”

The organization, which includes lay men and women as well as deacons and priests, “contributes to spreading Christ’s message to humanity by undertaking personal, organized apostolic activity,” she explained.

Her particular group is called “Hombre Nuevo” (New Man) and in January, the mass media apostolate headquartered in Los Angeles drove to Tijuana, Mexicali and Ensenada, Mexico, bringing more than 7,500 toys and 600 boxes of supplies and clothing for the poor. There were 191 cars, trucks and vans in the caravan, all aimed at 20 small villages south of the border.

Why does she do it? “Fulfillment,” she explained. “Most of us go around life without a purpose. I want to contribute to changing the world. If you can change or help one person, when I go it’ll be worthwhile.”

Hydraulic engineer mom helps Scouts, church, homeless

JODY FISCHER: When she was a little girl, Fischer (now a District hydraulic engineer) heard her mother ask a friend why she was so concerned about world hunger. The friend told Jody and her mother: “I can’t help world hunger, but I can help where I am now.” That was Fischer’s initial inspiration for what has become a life of giving outside the office.

“By working part-time, I’ve been blessed to have the opportunity to be a mother as well as being one of the mothers of today who use their talents and skills to enhance our future by nurturing, mentoring and training our youth.” She was a Cub Scout den and pack mother for six years, a member of Sellers Elementary School Site Council for two years and active at the school for a total of nine. She created and presented science experiments for classes, tutored small groups in math, presented a “great artists” session, did computer text work for the yearbook and promoted party games for three years.

At Boy Scout Troop 483, she provided training courses for three years in orienteering, environmental science, soil conservation and swimming. (Today she is the troops’ Swimming merit badge counselor.) “There is nothing more fun than a barrel of monkeys—except a pool full of 5th- and 6th-grade boys who can barely swim but think they’re future Olympians!” she recalled.

For five years she was a Sunday school teacher and superintendent and today assists in classes and mentor teens at her church.

Last summer, as part of the Girl Scouts “Walk-a-Day” program, a high school student and a Pomona College student asked to “shadow” her for a day at work. Instead of performing her usual hydraulic engineer chores, Fischer had them join her on her day off and took them on a tour of the local flood control, erosion control and civil works projects. “We spent the day donning our safety vests and hard hats,

discussing and viewing civil engineering in the works,” she recalled. Afterwards, the college student seemed to be “leaning toward civil engineering at Cal Poly Pomona—I hope we can see her in our field five years from now.”

Fischer is also involved in the East San Gabriel Valley Churches project with the county. She’s responsible for coordinating the collection of more than 1,000 personal contributions totaling \$10,000 worth of specific food products; they’re donated to help feed 150 homeless people at her church for 16 nights in January.

In December, the coalition received 190 homeless. “This is the most ever in its history,” Fischer said, as the usual number is 110 to 140. “Stretching the 150-person food supply and space will be an awesome task in the next two weeks. It’s great being involved with people who sincerely care about other people as fellow human beings. Each year I come away more enriched than the last year. I wonder who’s helping who—am I helping the homeless or are they helping me?”



Jody Fischer holds one of the hams that helped a needy family have a good holiday.

Terry Dean: deacon, elder and audio/visual expert for his church and clinic in Escondido

TERRENCE DEAN: From the Regulatory Branch in the San Diego Field Office, Dean drives to his church, the Westminster Presbyterian Church, USA, in Escondido. There, he’s an ordained elder and deacon, although he’s not currently serving on the Board of Deacons. As part of the Audio/Video team, he’s the main videographer, handling the live feed of the worship service to the overflow area in nearby Fellowship Hall. He sometimes operates the sound board as a mixer.



He also records and provides edited videos of special events at the church, including various phases of fundraising efforts for a new sanctuary and construction projects.

Along with the Interfaith Community Service in Escondido, Dean and other church members serve as host for two weeks for needy guests at the local “rotational shelter,” providing meals and a place to sleep.

Rounding out his extensive involvement with his church, he does maintenance work and performs videographic services at the Alternative Pregnancy Care Clinic in Escondido. “I hold annual baby showers at my church to benefit the clinic,” he said, “in association with our Mission Committee.”

At first, Dean didn’t want his name to be used in connection with these good deeds, “but if it’s necessary for your story, please at least don’t emphasize my involvement if you can help it.”

Damtender on the move with Prado, Scouts and baseball

LOUIE MUNOZ—As a damtender at Prado, Louie Munoz is used to juggling a lot of logistical balls—from telemetry reports to cleanup and maintenance to emergency responses during rainstorms. That ability comes in handy with his two major volunteer activities—Boy Scouts and Little League baseball.

Now in his 10th season as a Little League coach in San Dimas (he also coached five years in his 20s before he was married), Munoz has been able to watch his three sons—Christian, 17, Alex, 15, and Stephan, 13—grow as young adults, athletes and Scouts. Christian’s now a karate black belt, Alex plays catcher, first base and outfield and Stephan pitches and plays shortstop and second base.

Munoz is a leader in Boy Scout Troop 419, which has about 50 members in San Dimas. Christian is already an Eagle Scout, the highest rank, while Alex is now working on his Eagle Scout community project and Stephan is halfway there. Baseball practice and games account for three to four nights a week, March through July, and

besides the weekly scout meeting, Munoz also goes on campouts and organizes the boys’ community projects. “We have to juggle our schedule a lot,” he says, “but it’s a lot of fun.” It’s clear the Corps taught him to juggle well.



Louie Munoz with his son Stephan

Mangione to spend two months at Nepalese orphanage

LISA MANGIONE: In March the project manager for San Luis Obispo County in Regulatory's Ventura Field Office is taking a two-month leave of absence to volunteer working with children at an orphanage in Nepal, near the southern border of Tibet. "I am so appreciative of my supervisor's support and flexibility in allowing for this opportunity," she said.



Some of the children Lisa Mangione will be working with at a Nepalese orphanage.

Locally, Mangione has been volunteering for a nonprofit land trust, the Ventura Hillside Conservancy, since founding the group three years ago. As its Conservation Planning Committee chair, "I conduct and oversee various tasks related to natural resource protection, for example, grant writing and implementation, habitat management and acquisition strategy

plan review and development, public outreach and interpretive programs for children. I also provide technical advice to the Board of Trustees on biological resource and regulatory issues."

Last year, during the emergency flood season when Ventura County was declared a federal disaster area, the deadly landslide struck La Conchita. It claimed several lives and left the surviving community "emotionally and physically ravaged," Mangione said. She worked in the trenches during the week as a Corps regulator, but on weekends volunteered her services as a massage therapist at a local healing center (she's a certified massage therapist from Santa Barbara School of Massage.) The local facility had offered a three-month service of free services to victims, relatives and rescue workers. "To me," she said simply, "volunteering is an essential priority for a meaningful life."

Going to Nepal—she's never been anyplace in Asia—marks an exponential leap in her volunteerism. The orphanage, on Tibet's southern border, was founded by a Nepalese group with "an incredible litany of programs they've completed," Mangione said. "I don't know what one person can do in two months, but I'm sure it will affect me a lot, and if I can help the children, it will be worth it."

Arizona realty specialist makes own neighborhood safer



DEBORAH MITCHELL: For the past 12 years, the realty specialist in the Arizona/Nevada Real Estate Office has volunteered as Black Watch Captain for Getting Arizona Involved in Neighborhoods (GAIN). "Twice a year," she said, "the neighborhood gets together—either for a barbecue, dessert, garage sale or morning coffee events—to bring everyone up to date with the latest news from the Mesa Police Dept., updates of who moved in and who moved out of the subdivision and so on."

The Mitchells moved into the Mesa subdivision a dozen years ago "and they needed someone to be the leader," she recalled. "So I volunteered, like the good person I am." Besides GAIN's group activities, Mitchell makes sure that anyone who moves into the subdivision—which now has 35 homes—has an aerial photograph of the area and an up-to-date list of residents. It pays off. After robberies six months and four years ago, the perpetrators were caught by police "because our neighbors are aware of their surroundings," she said.

Decorated Vietnam vet keeps today's troops' morale high

DR. FRED-OTTO EGELER: The Vietnam vet (Purple Heart, Bronze Star for Valor) who runs the Public Affairs Office has continued his soldierly ways with non-random acts of kindness for today's troops. As a major in the California Military Reserve in charge of public affairs for the California National Guard's 40th Infantry Division, Dr. Egeler oversaw in January the many media requests to interview some 270 members of the division's Team Charlie, who just finished a rugged year-long tour in Iraq.

In February last year, he literally rolled up his sleeves and cooked and served breakfast for returning soldiers at Camp Roberts in central California. Ever since American forces deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, he has made sure they get some of the comforts of home by shipping hundreds of goodies-for-the-body/rations-for-the-soul to their Spartan overseas posts. And weeks before the soldiers' first Christmas in a hostile land, Egeler packed his reinforced shoeboxes with Christmas cards "so they could send them back home." To Maj. Robert Poole, a Corps officer then building schools in Afghanistan, he sent a box of Frisbees emblazoned with the red castle logo for the kids, "which are still sailing around outside the Afghanistan Engineer District Office."

Another lasting legacy of his commitment to soldiers: He helped design the brochure for the VFW's and VFW Ladies Auxiliary's "Operation Uplink" prepaid long-

distance telephone card. Egeler has inserted those cards, which let servicemen and women phone home free from nearly 30 countries, into the hundreds of boxes he has sent to Afghanistan and Iraq over the past four year. He also hands them out to Marine recruits at the School of Infantry at nearby Camp Pendleton.

Last Thanksgiving, Egeler and his wife Ursula helped box up more than 2,000 Christmas turkeys and all the fixin's for National Guard and needy families in Orange County. They both keep busy welcoming home California National Guard men and women from Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Guantanamo Bay and the Sinai when they return to the Joint Forces Training Base at Los Alamitos. "I get this great welling of pride inside me as I listen to their stories and experiences," he said. "It brings back memories of those I served with in Vietnam and who shared some of the experiences these returning warriors have endured."

His most solemn duty is to help family members of deceased Guard Soldiers at cemeteries throughout southern California. "It is an honor to be able to assist them at their time of need," he said, "but it doesn't end at the cemetery. I contact the families every month just to see how they're doing and to show that the military is still interested in them and their welfare. I try to enforce the motto, 'The Army takes care of its own!'"

Dr. Fred-Otto Egeler, aka Major, left, talks with German Army Oberstleutenant (LTC) Horst von Bergan during field exercises at Camp Roberts, Calif. One of Egeler's many volunteer duties with the California State Defense Force is to act as a translator when German personnel come to train with their sister units of the 40th Infantry Division. (Army photo)



Ex-middle-distance runner sprints to help at war college

JIM HEARN: The chief of Resource Management Branch is spending 10 months at the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pa., but that hasn't slowed his volunteering. Just as he's done the past two years at Pasadena's St. Andrews Church, Hearn is a Eucharistic minister and a lector at the local parish in the history-laden military town. "I believe God has blessed me with a lot of good things," he said. "This is a way to give back. It's something you need to do."

As one of only 17 civilians (among 340 students) at the venerable War College at Carlisle Barracks, Hearn is studying post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization. But that hasn't kept him from again raising his hand to volunteer. Each year the college sponsors the Jim Thorpe Sports Competition (named after the legendary American Indian athlete who attended then-Carlisle College) among six war colleges. This year, male and female teams will compete in track and field, basketball, golf, tennis, racquetball, volleyball and bowling. Hearn is responsible for coordinating the billeting of 600 participants, the rules, schedule and social activities for the three-day event, which more than 1,000 are expected to attend. For Hearn, it's something of a busman's holiday—at Iona College, he was a stellar quarter- and half-miler, and once ran against Villanova's legendary Marty Liquori.

Of his academic regimen, he says it's "a rare opportunity to think and study." And yet another opportunity to volunteer.



Jim Hearn ponders design modifications at a contest to build a sailable boat out of cardboard.

Budget analyst takes one for the team at Humane Society in San Berdoo



BETTY MELENDREZ: The lead budget analyst in Programs Management Branch volunteers with her husband, Edward, and daughter Christina, 23, at the Humane Society of San Bernardino Valley, during the Saturday vaccination clinics. They've been doing it since 1999. "We all love animals," she said, and they have a dog, Willie 11, and two cats, Katje (whom they got in Holland), who's 17, and Fred, 5.

"It's important that we all give back to our communities," Melendrez continued. "I want to teach Christina the same values we have—being part of a community where everybody is participating."

At the animal shelter, the family helps with sick animals, checking people in, answering the phone, raising funds and, once, persisting despite a feline felony. "One time I got bitten by a cat," Melendrez remembered. "I learned a valuable lesson—make sure they're in a cage."

PAO's Field of teams: videographer goes overtime as Scoutmaster and referee

JAY FIELD: The Public Affairs Office award-winning videographer and retired Army sergeant major Jay Field doesn't spend all his time behind a view-finder. For the last five years, he's been a Scoutmaster for his son's Boy Scout troop (even after his son made Eagle Scout four years ago), plus he's been a football referee from Pop Warner level to semi-pro leagues. (Refereeing pays per game, but the pittance sometimes is hardly worth the grief from fans, parents and players.)

Since 1990, Field has been a Cubmaster, Webelos den leader, Scoutmaster and Varsity scout leader. He's also a counselor for the Sports, Fitness, Swimming, Lifesaving, Communications, Journalism and Theater merit badges. "It's truly a blessing to join with these Scouts as they conduct their service projects, whether renovating a campsite, collecting food for the needy or making building blocks for disadvantaged children," Field relates. "It's

personally rewarding to see the growth of these young men as they progress from Tenderfoot (rank) to Eagle Scout."

Field has led such outdoor adventure activities for the boys as snorkeling in Emerald Bay, hiking Vasquez Rocks and rappelling down the cliffs at Zuma Beach, Malibu. He's also guided his charges for week-long summer camps on Catalina Island and Camp Chawanakee at Shaver Lake. "While the boys can try anyone's patience, it really is fun for me to work with them, helping them learn outdoor skills," he added.

Only two percent of all boys who join the Boy Scouts ever make it to the rank of Eagle—"and I've had more than a dozen out of my troop make it while I've been scoutmaster," Field said.

He's officiated football games for Pop Warner, high school, junior college and semi-pro—both women's and men's leagues. He admitted it can be "frustrating" dealing with coaches who don't know the rules, who've learned from watching the NFL on TV, whose rules are dramatically different from official high school regs. "But it's exciting to be at the right spot to make the call on an outstanding athletic play that leads to a touchdown," he enthused. "I enjoy working with youth and helping players and their coaches develop their programs."



Jay Field checks lines for his Scout troop as the boys prepare to rappel at Zuma Beach.

Red Cross features blue-chipper in Regulatory's Cohen

MARK COHEN: Soft-spoken and self-effacing as he sometimes appears, L.A. Regulatory Branch Project Manager Cohen sheds that image when he volunteers for the American Red Cross (ARC), something he has done since 1996. He began in Phoenix, where he lived at the time, working as a public affairs volunteer for the charity-writing press releases, news articles and working directly with the local press during local disasters; some of those included house fires.

With an undergrad degree in Political Science and a master's in Journalism from Arizona State, Cohen was well suited for his volunteer role. (He's now in his final year of law school at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles.)

After a couple of years, Cohen was picked as a national volunteer by ARC Headquarters in Washington. Ever since, he's worked on a "Rapid Response Team" composed of about 30 members who deal with disasters that are national in scope. "I work as a spokesperson, providing information the Red Cross disaster response to national and international media outlets," he explained. "For example, I'll describe what services the Red Cross is offering and where. The Red Cross responds to communities' needs. Often this means educating people on what to do to prepare for a disaster. After a disaster, when needed, the Red Cross will open shelters, providing food and medical care to those displaced."

His recent deployments as an ARC spokesman read like a Top 10 list of national natural and man-made disasters: the World Trade Center in 2001; the Colorado and Arizona Rodeo/Chediski wildfires June 2002; Typhoon Pongsona on Guam December 2002; the San Bernardino Grand Prix wildfire October 2003; and Hurricane Rita September 2005. "The Red Cross is an incredibly worthwhile organization," he said. "The work they do benefits thousands and thousands of people every year at the time they need it most. I wanted to help out in any way that I could."



Above: Mark Cohen discusses American Red Cross shelter services with a Hurricane Rita evacuee.

Left: Cohen assists with meal service for hurricane evacuees at the American Red Cross shelter.



Fort Huachuca's Brown and family build homes in Mexico border town



MICHAEL BROWN: Brown is a project engineer at the District's Fort Huachuca Project Office. For the past four winters, he, his wife Christie and their sons Thomas and Hunter have helped build houses in Agua Prieta, Mexico, just across the international border from Douglas, some 60 miles from Fort Huachuca.

(The Corps recently built the largest Border Patrol station in the U.S. at Douglas.)

Over the last decade, population of the Mexican city has exploded as people from the country's interior flock there looking for jobs. They also use the city as a jumping-off point for illegal entry into the U.S.

"Many have found neither," Brown said, "and end up struggling to survive on the outskirts of Agua Prieta." The Mexican government has divided an area of land at

the southern edge of town into lots; each lot has a water hose outlet and, eventually, an electrical outlet. "I have heard that the people pay for the lots, but I imagine many are squatters, as I don't see how they could pay," Brown observed.

"The houses we build are very small—14-feet-by-31-feet-by-8 inches—very simple structures, but are a vast improvement over the shacks people in this poorest part of town live in." The houses are made of a fired mud brick

called ladrillo, with two doors, three windows, a tin roof and insulation in the ceiling. "Not much," said Brown, "but each house improves the life of one family. My church, Sierra Evangelical Lutheran, in Sierra Vista, Ariz., pays for and builds one or two houses each year. Each Saturday afternoon as we return home, we all know how fortunate we are. The poverty leaves many with a deep sense of despair for the people in this area, but we do leave with a satisfaction of knowing that we are able to improve the lives of at least one family."

The work is coordinated by the Ladrillo Project, a small-scale charity based at a Lutheran church in Douglas, and organized by Dan Schoenfelder, a local rancher. The project has built about 100 houses over the past 10 years. "Dan seems to run this charity single-handedly, out of his truck," Brown said. "He interviews the potential home owners (he currently has 100 families on a waiting list), coordinates volunteer groups, materials (bought both locally and donated) and the construction efforts."



Michael Brown's son Hunter and wife Christie work at building a wall in one of the houses in Agua Prieta, Mexico.